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SUBJECT: Jordan: King Hussein's Palestinian Strategy

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Summary

King Hussein's closure of PLO offices in Jordan in early July underscores his intent to undermine Chairman Arafat's leadership of the PLO. Despite his determination, we believe the King faces a difficult, uphill battle in attempting to carry out his bold, high-risk strategy. The increasingly public Jordanian challenge to Arafat, moreover, will seriously complicate Hussein's efforts to encourage a pro-Jordanian leadership in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

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Jordan's 7 July shutdown of Fatah offices and expulsion of leading Fatah personnel show that Hussein wants to separate his confrontation with PLO Chairman Arafat from his support of the PLO as the "sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people"--a position formalized at the Rabat Arab summit of 1974. The King may hope to reconfigure the PLO as it was in the 1960's, a strictly political organization subservient to its Arab patrons. Hussein ultimately intends to replace Arafat and the current PLO leadership with moderate, pro-Jordanian Palestinians.

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Hussein's support for former chief of Fatah Military Intelligence Abu Zaim, leader of a fledgling anti-Arafat movement in Jordan, has been limited to providing safehaven for Abu Zaim and his supporters. Abu Zaim is gaining a higher profile in Amman, however, and the King may be considering publicly announcing his support for Abu Zaim's movement to encourage an alternative PLO

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This memorandum was prepared by []

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Information as of 21 July 1986 was used in its preparation. Questions and
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leadership. [REDACTED]

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Jordan-Syrian Cooperation

Hussein is convinced that prospects for ousting Arafat depend largely on cooperation from Syria and other Arab states. To this end, the King probably will continue to court Damascus and try to facilitate a reconciliation between President Assad and Iraqi leader Saddam Husayn. The indefinite postponement of a meeting Jordan proposed between the Syrian and Iraqi Foreign Ministers apparently has not discouraged the King from persisting with his reconciliation strategy.

Our Embassy in Amman reports that King Hussein is now planning separate visits to Assad and Husayn after receiving Saudi King Fahd's pledge of support during recent meetings in Riyadh. The King met with Husayn on 19 July in a bid to renew Iraqi-Syrian reconciliation. [REDACTED]

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Hussein's West Bank Strategy

The closing of PLO Offices in Amman will seriously complicate Hussein's efforts to undermine support for the PLO and encourage a pro-Jordanian leadership in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. West Bank Palestinian public sentiment--as reflected in Palestinian newspaper commentaries--has rallied strongly behind the PLO since the closings, and distrust of Jordanian intentions has grown markedly. Hussein's move has reawakened longstanding suspicions about his interest in dominating the Palestinian movement and regaining control of the West Bank. [REDACTED]

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Jordan has outlined an ambitious and costly five-year development plan to improve the quality of life in the territories. We believe Hussein hopes his development plan will shore up pro-Jordanian sentiment. He may also hope the projects eventually will build support for Abu Zaim's anti-Arafat movement. The King's ability to enhance his position by dispensing money is severely limited, however, by Jordan's own economic problems and reduced Arab aid. He will have to rely on outside help at a time when Arab financial aid to Jordan has declined. [REDACTED]

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Moreover, the King wants to appoint new mayors for the West Bank acceptable to Israel before the scheduled rotation of the Israeli premiership in October. Despite Jordanian promises of protection--possibly by providing payment for bodyguards--the PLO will increase its efforts to stymie Jordan through the use of threats and intimidation. Most moderate West Bank leaders fear they will suffer the same fate as Nablus Mayor Zafir al-Masri, who was murdered by Palestinian radicals in March shortly after his appointment for allegedly cooperating with Israeli and Jordanian officials. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

King Hussein also may be trying to interest the Israelis in a joint attempt to curtail pro-Arafat political activity on the West Bank. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Israelis have an obvious vested interest in supporting Hussein's efforts, but their involvement will increase the risk of PLO-arranged assassinations of West Bank and Gaza moderates. [REDACTED]

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Impact on the PLO

King Hussein's crackdown on Arafat supporters almost certainly will strengthen Fatah hardliners, including Wazir, Salah Khalaf and Faruq Qaddumi, who oppose close cooperation with Jordan. These hardliners undoubtedly will press for formal abrogation of the Jordan-PLO accord of 11 February and reconciliation with anti-Arafat groups based in Damascus.

On the other hand, Fatah moderates, such as Hani and Khalid al-Hasan, will continue to seek moderate Arab support from Saudi Arabia and Egypt in an attempt to block Jordan's strategy. These moderates, although frustrated with Arafat's inability to make progress on the peace process, are unlikely soon to switch allegiances from Arafat to King Hussein. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

Hussein's plan is flawed by the assumption that he can gain firm commitments to undermine Arafat from key states--Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Egypt--that historically have proven unable to closely coordinate strategy over an extended period. Major difficulties over the Gulf War, Lebanon, and other issues between moderates and radicals, principally Syria, would have to be overcome or at least shelved before an Arab summit blessing Arafat's ouster could be held. Hussein would have poor prospects for pre-cooking an Arab conclave that in effect would be asked to overturn the 1974 Rabat Summit recognizing the PLO--read Arafat personally--as the "sole, legitimate representative" of the Palestinians. [REDACTED]

Despite serious challenges to his leadership since Israel forced the PLO out of Lebanon in 1982, Arafat retains considerable political prestige among [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] 25X1

rank-and-file commandos, as well as Palestinians in the diaspora and the West Bank and Gaza. We have no evidence of significant Palestinian support for Abu Zaim, despite growing Jordanian support. A Fatah General Congress--the quasi-parliamentary body which elects most of Fatah's leaders--probably would have to be convened to endorse a new PLO leader. Anti-Arafat forces so far have not gathered enough Palestinian support to hold a congress. [REDACTED] 25X1

Jordan's interest in cooperating with Israel to counter PLO influence is probably an effort to block increased anti-Jordanian activity on the West Bank resulting from closure of the pro-Arafat offices in Amman. Hussein will continue exploring opportunities to undermine Arafat and build a pro-Jordanian West Bank leadership--with Israeli encouragement--but the depth of the support for Arafat suggests that few West Bank leaders are likely in the near term to join with the King. [REDACTED] 25X1

Although Assad and Hussein agree that Arafat must go, they would eventually disagree over a successor should Arafat disappear from the scene. Damascus has been in no hurry to force the issue, probably in the hope that further decline in Jordanian-PLO relations will weaken both parties and strengthen Syria's voice in selecting new Palestinian leaders. [REDACTED] 25X1

[REDACTED] 25X1